

# China admits Three Gorges Dam has 'urgent problems' as drought persists



Water is released from the sluice for flood prevention at the Three Gorges Dam in Yichang on July 20, 2010.

**Beijing (CNN)** -- In a rare admission, the Chinese government has said the Three Gorges Dam -- the world's largest hydropower plant -- is having "urgent problems," warning of environmental, construction and migration "disasters" amid the worst drought to hit southern China in 50 years.

China's State Council, the country's Cabinet, this week said that while the dam has been beneficial to the region, there has also been a variety of issues since construction began in 1992.

"At the same time that the Three Gorges Dam project provides huge comprehensive benefits, urgent problems must be resolved regarding the smooth relocation of residents, ecological protection and geological disaster prevention," the statement said.

This is the first major official acknowledgment of the dam's repercussions. The Chinese government also admitted the [Three Gorges Dam](#) has negatively impacted downstream river water, transport and migration.

"Some problems emerged at various stages of project planning and construction but could not be solved immediately due to the conditions at the time," the State Council said. "Some arose because of increased demands brought on by economic and social development."

The project, which cost more than 180 billion yuan (US\$28 billion), has been a source of pride for the government while also arousing intense debate among scientists and villagers. Completed in 2006, the dam includes a five-tier ship lock, a reservoir, and 26 hydropower turbo-generators. The dam was originally touted for its ability to control the impact of flooding that threatens the Yangtze river delta each summer.

However, millions of Chinese citizens have been adversely impacted throughout the construction process and even after the dam's completion.

The Three Gorges displaced over 1.4 million residents along the Yangtze during the digging and construction of a giant concrete barrier, made up of 16 million tons of concrete. More than 1,000 towns and villages were flooded in the process. Landslides and pollution have plagued the areas near the dam since it was built.

Meanwhile, a prolonged drought has persisted along the Yangtze, affecting nearly 10 million people along the river's middle and lower sections, in Hunan, Hubei, Jiangxi and Anhui provinces, according to the official Xinhua news agency.

Citizens in the region are blaming the dam's restriction on river flow for exacerbating the effects of the drought.

These regions will mostly see hot and dry weather during the coming week, the [China](#) Meteorological Administration warned.

Meteorological data also indicated that rainfall in drought-affected regions was down 30% to 80% compared to levels in normal years, while the provinces of Anhui, Jiangsu, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangxi, Zhejiang, and the city of Shanghai continue suffering from the worst drought since 1954, Xinhua

reported.

Provincial and local departments have been instructed to activate cloud-seeding to induce rainfall if necessary.

The government has ordered 5 billion cubic meters of water to be discharged from the Three Gorges Dam over the next 20 days to ease the effects of the drought. But officials say the order, which follows the release of 1.86 billion cubic meters of water in the first two weeks of May, will have a limited impact on fighting drought conditions.

"All the discharged water can only reach areas along the Jingjiang section of the Yangtze River, meaning the drought situation in three places in the central part in Hubei... will be relieved to some degree," said Wang Jingquan, a senior official of the flood control and drought relief office affiliated to the Yangtze River Water Resources Committee.

"The far lower reach of the river can only get very limited benefits," he said as reported in the state-run China Daily.

"With the current observation devices and data, we have found no evidence that the drought was caused by the dam," Liu Min, a meteorological specialist with the Hubei Provincial Weather Bureau, told Xinhua.